DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 194 CS 510 914

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TITLE	Creating Dramatic Monologues from "The Grapes of Wrath." [Lesson Plan].
INSTITUTION	Discovery Communications, Inc., Bethesda, MD.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	13p.; Audio and video clips included in the web site version of this lesson plan are not available from ERIC.
AVAILABLE FROM	DiscoverySchool.com; Florence, KY; Tel: 800-889-9950. Full text at: http://school.discovery.com/ teachers/.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Characterization; Class Activities; English Instruction; Language Arts; Lesson Plans; Literature Appreciation; *Novels; Primary Sources; Secondary Education; Vocabulary Development; Writing Assignments

ABSTRACT

Based on John Steinbeck's novel "The Grapes of Wrath," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand the universal nature of Steinbeck's characters' struggles and some of the complex forces affecting their lives; and the value of primary source material in presenting an authentic picture of a given period in history. The main activity of the lesson involves students researching primary source material to collaboratively write a dramatic monologue for characters in the novel. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

Lesson title:
Creating Dramatic Monologues from *The Grapes of Wrath*

Grade level:
9-12, with adaptation for younger students

Subject area:
Literature

Duration:
Two 50-minute class periods; three, if students have computers with Internet access

Objectives:
Students will understand the following:

1. the universal nature of Steinbeck"s characters' struggles and some of the complex forces affecting their lives; and
2. the value of primary source material in presenting an authentic picture of an given period in history.

Materials:

1. Students' copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* for reference and any class or personal notes they may have on the novel and its characters
2. Writing paper, pencils or pens
3. 3" x 5" index cards with one of the following names on each (use as many as needed and repeat some, if you choose): Tom Joad; Ma Joad; Jim Casy; Granma or Granpa Joad; Rosasharn; Connie Rivers; Al Joad; a big California farmer; Muley Graves or any of the farmers who stay behind and ' didn't head west; Jim Rawley or any camp manager at a government-run migrant camp.
4. Downloaded image of Cotton Pickers announcement http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=afcts&fileName=sb001/sb001.db&recNum=20 *from Voices from the Dust Bowl*, photocopied for class use.
5. Downloaded image of migrant mother with family in makeshift tent http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pnp/ppmsc/00200/00230r.jpg from Dorothea Lange photographs for the Farm Security Administration, photocopied for class use.
6. Downloaded document of Associated Farmers Declaration of Law and Order http://lcweb2.loc.gov/afc/afcts/images/sb001/0012.jpg, photocopied for class
7. (Optional) Computers with Internet access for optional first-day activity with primary sources from Library of Congress collection, *Voices from the Dust Bowl*.
8. Take-Home Worksheet: Literary Illusion

Procedures:

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1. (Optional.) If you have Internet access, have students explore Web sites about the Dust Bowl. This exercise could be completed by individual students or by small groups.
   - Have students access the Library of Congress Web site, *Voices from the Dust Bowl* http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/afctshtml/tshome.html. Students should pay special attention to "The Migrant Experience" section at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/afctshtml/tsme.html.
   - Encourage them to browse the collection for 20-30 minutes and select two or three compelling items they feel enhance their understanding of *The Grapes of Wrath*.
   - Ask them to share their choices and explain why they selected them.

2. The next day, assign students to small groups (three or four, depending on class size) or allow students to choose their own groups. Designate a leader responsible for keeping the group on task and a recorder to note the group members' responses to the day's assignment. Inform them that you will collect this work for evaluation.

3. Distribute packets of the three downloaded primary sources for students to examine. Holding the index cards, fanned out, with characters' names face down, ask one student from each group to select any card.

4. Have groups discuss and record their answers to questions in relation to their character. To reinforce discussion, encourage them to use their novels, notes, personal understanding of the book, and the primary material.
   - What three or four carefully selected adjectives best describe the character's dominant personality traits?
   - What two or three questions would you like to ask this character that would help you to better understand the individual?
   - What two or three objects or symbols do you associate with this character?

5. Explain that during the next class each group will be collaboratively writing a dramatic monologue (suggested length: 25-35 lines) for the character they are analyzing. Take time to review the elements of dramatic monologue if the form is unfamiliar to students:

   > A dramatic monologue is a type of poem (generally free verse, in a very conversational tone) that is voiced by a single speaker to a quiet listener or to the reader. Although the speaker addresses a specific topic, in the process, the individual unwittingly reveals a great deal about her/himself.

6. Identify criteria for the monologue student groups will be writing. It should
   - meet the definition of a dramatic monologue,
   - accurately and appropriately represent the character in a voice that seems authentic to that individual,
   - reflect a knowledge of the character and his/her role in the novel, and
   - reveal some previously unknown facet of the character's life (i.e., the audience should gain a deeper understanding of the character's psychology).

7. Have student groups draft the topic their character will address in his/her monologue. They might choose to have the character answer one of the questions they posed in procedure step number 4. As they begin discussing their monologue, encourage students to think about the Depression Era images they reviewed. These primary sources should help them understand what life was like for migrant workers. At end of class, collect recorded notes from each group and encourage students to think about the writing for the next class and to come prepared with ideas.

8. The next day, have students immediately get into their character groups, return notes from previous class, instruct them to work on their collaborative writing. Stress the length limit (approximately 30-35 minutes) and other criteria you have set. Realize that the students can only write a draft, but they may produce some very creative work. You will be able to assess their understanding of the characters and the major ideas in the novel.

9. During the remaining time, select one student from each group to read and share each group's product with the class. If time allows, ask for comments.

10. For homework, assign students the Take-Home Worksheet: Literary Illusion. In this activity, students examine the lyrics of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and consider why Steinbeck used this poem as the source for the title of his novel.

Adaptation for younger students:
Younger students may not be familiar with *The Grapes of Wrath*, but the images from this lesson may be used to introduce students to the Depression and the Dust Bowl. Another effective introduction to the plight of the farmers during the Dust Bowl is the Newbery Award winning *Out of the Dust*, told through the eyes of an adolescent in a series of diary-like poems (good model for dramatic monologue). If using primary sources for the dramatic monologues, choose visuals, such as photos of the migrant workers' children and families and the migrant camps, rather than sources that are chiefly documents. Limit dramatic monologue choices to voices that do not require political background, for example, a child, mother, or father living at a migrant camp, a teacher volunteering at a migrant camp, or a doctor or nurse administering to the migrant workers and their families. Vocabulary words such as synonymous, derisive, vigilante, indigent, and arable can be used if explained clearly.

Discussion Questions:

1. After people read *The Grapes of Wrath*, many forgot the Joads were only make-believe. Discuss what you think caused the public to view these fictional people as real.
2. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Steinbeck said, ". . . the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit—for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion and love." Debate whether or not the author met his own standards in the writing of *The Grapes of Wrath*.
3. At first, Ma Joad feels the "fambly" is what life is all about and is all that is important. Trace how her view changes and analyze what statement Steinbeck is making through this change.

4. *The Grapes of Wrath* is described as among the most loved and the most hated of books. Discuss what elements you think caused it to be highly praised. What elements do you think caused it to be banned and burned in some communities?
5. Some literary criticism maintains *The Grapes of Wrath* is an allegory, a story where characters, setting, and events have both a literal and symbolic meaning. Explore what the Joads' journey along Route 66 might symbolize. Discuss what different characters like Tom Joad, Ma, Jim Casy, or Granma and Granpa might symbolize.
6. In the first chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath*, as part of the description of the Dust Bowl, Steinbeck writes, "The men were silent and they did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men—to feel whether this time the men would break." Discuss the mood this image evokes. What tone does it set for the novel?

Evaluation:
The monologue lesson can be evaluated with a simple three-part rubric based on the criteria given to the students at the beginning of the activity:

> Three points: Preliminary group work reviewing online sources and analyzing images), was correctly and thoroughly completed. Writing fits definition of a dramatic monologue and is written in a voice that seems authentic to the character. Writing reflects an understanding of the character and his/her role in the novel.
>
> Two points: Preliminary group work (reviewing online sources and analyzing images), was adequately completed. Writing fits some of the definition of a dramatic monologue and is written in a voice that shows some authenticity to the character. Writing reflects some understanding of the character and his/her role in the novel.
>
> One point: Preliminary group work (reviewing online sources and analyzing images), was incomplete. Writing does not fit the definition of a dramatic monologue and is not written in a voice that seems to the character. Writing does not reflect an understanding of the character and his/her role in the novel.

Because the lesson entails collaborative preparation and writing, everyone in the group receives the same grade.

Extension:

<u>Route 66 ". . . The Road of Flight."</u>
Explain the significance of Route 66 in the great westward migration of farmers during the Depression. Give some background about the historic significance of Route 66, including a description of its spanand how it goes from coast to coast. Give the students a map of the United States that has the states filled in, or ask them to fill in the states. Ask them to use the text of *The Grapes of Wrath* and a US road map to trace the Joads" odyssey. Depending upon how much depth you want, ask students to identify what happens at each of the stops and what the symbolism or message of that stop might be.

"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

How much was that dime worth that is mentioned in the classic Depression era song? Have students do some research and typical wages were for migrant farmers in the farm fields of the West. (Steinbeck mentions some wages in *The Grapes of Wrath*.) Have students compile a list of staples that every family's cupboard should hold and then have them do some research to find out how much these items cost during the Depression (select a specific year,such as 1938). Based on this little lesson in home economics, ask them to come to some conclusions about the plight of the migrant farmers. For further extension, have them compare today"s prices with 1938 prices.

Tom Joad, Of Thee I Sing
Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, containing the hardships and the struggles of the Joads, inspired other artists in their creations. In the world of music, balladeer Woody Guthrie wrote "The Ballad of Tom Joad." The lead song on a Bruce Springsteen album by the same name is "The Ghost of Tom Joad." Have students find the lyrics to these two songs and compare them to the Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Finally, have them compare the two songs to each other. How do they portray Tom Joad differently?

Suggested Readings:

Driven from the Land: The Story of the Dust Bowl
Milton Meltzer, Benchmark Books, 2000.
Melzter describes the economic and environmental conditions that led to the Great Depression and the horrific dust storms that drove people from their homes during the 1930s. Documentary photographs and quotes from those most affected bring the period to life.

John Steinbeck
Catherine Reef, Clarion Books, 1996.
This biography interweaves Steinbeck's experiences, excerpts of his writing, and photographs of both his subjects and of him to chronicle his life, and an important time in history.

Web Links:

SJSU Center for Steinbeck Studies
This web site offers biographical information and photos of Steinbeck and links researcher to other sites and Steinbeck archives. Its goal seems to be to promote Steinbeck studies.
http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/steinbec/srchome.html

The Internet Public Library -Steinbeck
The IPL site contains links to critical and biographical information about Steinbeck which can be accessed by author's name, book title, or literary time period in America.
http://www.ipl.org/ref/litcrit/

American Studies @ the University of Virginia

As a good companion to the novel, this site contains a section on the 1930s presented through the lenses of films, radio programs, print, and other forms of cultural expression. It requires ShockWave, RealPlayer, and Netscape 3.0 or better for optimal use.
http://xroads.virginia.edu/

Voices from the Dust Bowl
Located in the American Memory collection, this is an excellent multi-media resource for the lives of those portrayed in GRAPES OF WRATH
http://lcweb.loc.gov/

History eSearch.com
All links on this comprehensive history site have been previewed for quality academic content. Many US history/Depression Era links contain excellent primary sources.
http://www.snowcrest.net/jmike/

Vocabulary:

arable
Definition: Fit for or used for growing crops.
Context: The great drought of the early 1930's and the windstorms that followed turned formerly arable land into dust.

derisive
Standard Definition: Expressing or showing contempt or scorn.
Context: The uprooted people of the Dust Bowl were called by the derisive name "Okies."

harrowing
Definition: To bring trouble, distress, or agitation.
Context: Steinbeck describes the experiences of most of the migrant families as harrowing; there seems to be no end to their struggles and hardships.

indigent
Definition: Suffering from indigence; impoverished.
Context: The hard working farmers of the Dust Bowl, some of whose families had lived on the same land for generations, became indigent after they lost their homes.

migrant
Definition: A person who moves regularly to find work, especially harvesting crops.
Context: The life of the migrant farmer is dictated by the cycles of planting and harvesting.

synonymous
Definition: Alike in meaning or significance.
Context: The novel *The Grapes of Wrath* is synonymous with the Great Depression.

veracity
Definition: Devotion to the truth; truthfulness.

Context: Although *The Grapes of Wrath* is fiction, when it was published, its veracity stirred public opinion.

vigilante
Definition: A self-appointed doer of justice.
Context: The migrant workers of the Depression were often the victims of violent vigilante groups who resented their presence.

Academic standards:

All national academic standards used on this site are compiled and provided to Discovery Channel School by the Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) in Aurora, Colorado.

Grade level:
9-12
Subject area:
Language Arts
Standard:
Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process.
Benchmarks:

- Recognizes the effectiveness of writing techniques in accomplishing an author's purpose.
- Identifies and analyzes the philosophical assumptions and basic beliefs underlying an author's work.

Grade level:
9-12 **Subject area:**
Language Arts

Standard:
Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.
Benchmarks:

- Understands the effects of complex literary devices and techniques (e.g., tone, irony, mood, figurative language, allusion, diction, dialogue, symbolism, point of view, style) on the overall quality of a work (e.g., tone, irony, mood, figurative language, allusion, diction, dialogue, symbolism, point of view, style)
- Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works

Grade level:
9-12
Subject area:
Geography
Standard:
Understands how physical systems affect human systems.

Benchmarks: Knows changes in the physical environment that have reduced the capacity of the environment to support human activity (e.g., the drought-plagued Sahel; the depleted rain forests of central Africa; the Great Plains Dust Bowl; the impact of the economic exploitation of Siberia's resources on a fragile sub-Arctic environment).

Credit:
Alisa Soderquist, humanities teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia.

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Literary Illusion

A literary allusion is when a writer makes reference to someone or something that is well known. By alluding to a famous thing, the writer also implies a relationship between his/her writing and the allusion. Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," one of the most famous American patriotic songs during the Civil War years. John Steinbeck chose to use some of its lyrics for the title of his famous Depression Era novel.

Read these lyrics carefully and note the vivid images and the tone of the song. Now put yourself into Steinbeck's mind. On the back of this sheet, explain why this is the source for the title *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The borders have intentionally been left blank so that you may, in the tradition of earlier sheet music, illustrate the song with images from the lyrics or images from the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Battle Hymn of the Republic

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,
He has loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel,
"As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;"
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel
Since God is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
Revisit Depression-era American through John Steinbeck's classic tale of the Joads: a family forced to leave Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl and travel west, to California, in search of migrant labor and the promise of hope.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⓟ

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

TITLE OF VIDEO:
The Grapes of Wrath

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What event precipitated the Great Depression, and what was its ultimate effect on America's workforce?

2. The Joad family featured in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is evicted from its Oklahoma farm and goes west on "the path of a people in flight." What famous highway is described this way in Steinbeck's novel?

3. What American work of the 19th century served as the source for the title of Steinbeck's novel?

4. What economic and social conditions do the Joads find upon their entry into the "promised land" of California?

5. What is "the crime beyond denunciation" that Steinbeck alerts his readers to in the most famous chapter of the novel?

6. What dramatic event at the end of the novel triggers Tom Joad's acceptance of his future role as an activist?

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The Grapes of Wrath

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What event precipitated the Great Depression, and what was its ultimate effect on America's workforce?
The event that precipitated the Great Depression was the stock market crash of 1929. Twelve million Americans, one-quarter of the labor force, found themselves out of work during the depression.

2. The Joad family featured in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is evicted from its Oklahoma farm and goes west on "the path of a people in flight." What famous highway is described this way in Steinbeck's novel?
"The path of a people in flight" that the Joad family travels west on is Highway 66.

3. What American work of the 19th century served as the source for the title of Steinbeck's novel?
Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" served as the source for the title *The Grapes of Wrath*.

4. What economic and social conditions do the Joads find upon their entry into the "promised land" of California?
Upon entering California, the Joads find joblessness, vigilantes who harass the migrant population, and growers who fear the rise of organized labor.

5. What is "the crime beyond denunciation" that Steinbeck alerts his readers to in the most famous chapter of the novel?
"The crime beyond denunciation" that Steinbeck describes is that people starve because the growers cannot make a profit on the food they produce. The growers' response is to withhold or restrict the available supply of food.

6. What dramatic event at the end of the novel triggers Tom Joad's acceptance of his future role as an activist?
The murder of his friend and mentor, Jim Casey, galvanizes Tom Joad into accepting the role of social activist.

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